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Hispanic Heritage Month

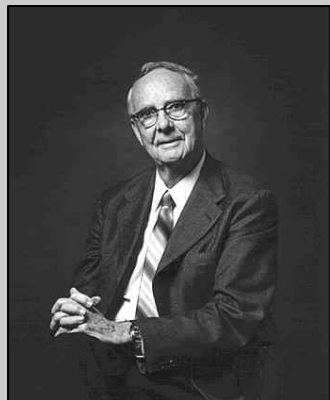
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Getting Involved: Our Families, Our Community, Our Nation

OCTOBER 2, 2008

DCF CENTRAL OFFICE

Luis Walter Alvarez



Luis Walter Alvarez
Physicist and Inventor



SPAIN / CUBA



Alvarez was inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame in 1978.

LUIS WALTER ALVAREZ was the son of Walter C. Alvarez, a doctor who for a time was a researcher at the Mayo Clinic, and Harriet Smythe, and a grandson of Luis F. Alvarez, a doctor in Hawaii who found a better method for diagnosing macular leprosy. His aunt, Mabel Alvarez, was a California artist specializing in oil painting. Luis W. had two children by each of his two spouses. One son, Walter Alvarez, is a professor of geology at the University of California, Berkeley.

Alvarez was an physicist and inventor, who spent nearly his entire professional career on the faculty of the University of California, Berkeley. He won the 1968 Nobel Prize in Physics for "the discovery of a large number of resonance states, made possible through his development of the technique of using hydrogen bubble chamber and data analysis." This research allowed scientists to record and study the short lived particles created in particle accelerators. In 1987, the USA Department of Energy granted him its Enrico Fermi award.

Alvarez proposed a jet-recoil theory for the Kennedy assassination to explain why John F. Kennedy's head jerked backwards even if the President was shot from behind, which would have been the case if Lee Harvey Oswald were the assassin. During World War II, Alvarez's work on military technology was of the highest importance. He was a key participant in the Manhattan Project, including Project Alberta, the actual dropping of the atom bomb. He was on board The Great Artiste, the observation plane for the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, as a scientific observer.

In 1945, he received the Collier Trophy, the highest American government honor in aviation, for developing the Ground Controlled Approach system (GCA), which allows airplanes to land when visibility is poor. After the war, he invented the synchrotron. Over his entire lifetime, he was granted more than 40 patents, a few which proved commercially viable. In 1978, he was inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame.

In 1980, Alvarez and his son, Walter, presented the asteroid-impact theory as an explanation for the presence of an unusual abundance of iridium associated with the geological event referred to as the K-T extinction boundary. Ten years after this initial proposal, evidence of a huge impact crater called Chicxulub off the coast of Mexico strongly confirmed their theory. An impact by an extraterrestrial body is now the accepted explanation for the extinction of the dinosaurs.

Luis Walter Alvarez Audio

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